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“Is there such a thing as a detour?”:

The Study of Language and Comprehension in Charlotte Delbo and Paul Celan

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Honors Thesis

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Within the study of trauma literature, many scholars from a wide variety of academic backgrounds, including Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Michael Rothberg, and George Steiner, disagree as to whether or not a writer effectively can communicate a traumatic event through language. Steiner's book, Language and Silence, first published in 1967, was one of the earliest studies that explored the relationship between language and trauma, thus influencing scholars for decades. In his study, Steiner claims that a traumatic event only can be conveyed through silence. Felman and Laub altered the continuing debate about language in their joint study Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History, published in 1991, which argues that language can register but not master a traumatic event, such as the Holocaust,<sup>1</sup> that vastly exceeds the witness's framework of understanding. The trauma experienced amidst the Holocaust, which psychologically, emotionally, and physically impacted the prisoners, was so severe that it destroyed all of the common referents between the victim and the "other," including both listeners and readers. Felman interprets the poetry of Paul Celan, a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, to demonstrate how he recreates an addressable thou by aesthetically destabilizing his poetry to denounce the existence of artistic mastery. Alternatively, in his book, Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation (2000), Michael Rothberg discusses the impact the Holocaust had on the real within aesthetic representation. He specifically explores the work of Charlotte Delbo, a non-Jewish survivor of both Auschwitz and the Holocaust, in the chapter entitled

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<sup>1</sup> The term "Holocaust," which describes the Nazis' systematic mass murder of European Jewry, homosexuals, gypsies, and political prisoners during World War II, is a controversial word as its definition, burnt offering, attaches a sacrificial connotation that evades a seemingly incomprehensible truth.

"Unbearable Witness: Charlotte Delbo's Traumatic Timescapes." Within his essay, Rothberg argues that Delbo uses metaphors effectively to communicate the trauma of living through and surviving Auschwitz, the largest and most well-known concentration camp.

Though all of the scholars present convincing arguments, my study of Charlotte Delbo and Paul Celan suggests that the relationship between language and comprehension demonstrates both the limitation and the ability of language to describe the Holocaust experience. In her memoir Auschwitz and After (1995), Delbo describes her Auschwitz experience through a series of disjointed vignettes that prevent the reader from fulfilling any preconceived narrative expectation. Structurally, Delbo combines both sequential and non-linear vignettes in order to permit the reader to experience the similar jarring effects of arbitrary randomness that the concentration camp prisoners endured. Within each vignette, she removes the reader's established referents by exploiting the malleability of language so that the reader can visually witness the deadly impacts of linguistic deception. Similarly, Celan's "Bremen Speech" (1958) speaks from a place of intention where linguistic and physical mastery used to rule, in hopes of finding an approachable audience who not only comprehends his Holocaust experience but also understands his present disorientation. He demonstrates this loss of mastery by employing cryptic metaphors and disrupting linguistic cohesion in his poem "No More Sand Art" (1965). The rhythmical unpredictability mirrors his current lack of aesthetic and personal mastery while his use of obscure metaphors prevent the reader from obtaining a sense of mastery as she cannot establish a precise conclusion from his poem. By preventing their readers from establishing a lasting referent and violating the ordinary



usage of syntax, Delbo and Celan stylistically convey their Holocaust experiences through language, despite language's distinct limitations.

Charlotte Delbo was working with a theater group in Argentina when the German forces occupied her home country, France. Even though she knew of the innumerable risks she faced in returning to Nazi-occupied France, Delbo left Argentina in an attempt to help her communist companions spread anti-Nazi pamphlets. However, on 2 March 1942, the French police arrested Delbo and her husband, Georges Dudach, for their involvement in the anti-Nazi resistance. In May of that same year, she said goodbye to her husband for the last time; he later was executed by a firing squad while in prison. On 24 January 1943, Delbo was deported in a convoy of 230 French women to Auschwitz-Birkenau. She remained in Birkenau, the women's sector of the camp, for six months before the Nazis sent her and some of the other women from her convoy to work at Raisko, an agricultural laboratory. Six months after they sent the prisoners to Raisko, in January of 1944, the Nazis deported Delbo and the remaining survivors to Ravensbrück concentration camp. On 23 April 1945, the Red Cross liberated Ravensbrück, and after a brief recuperation period in Sweden, Delbo returned to Paris. On 1 March 1985, Charlotte Delbo died of lung cancer.

In 1946, shortly after she arrived in Paris, Delbo wrote the first section of her memoir, None of Us Will Return; she buried the manuscript in a drawer until she decided to publish it in 1965. Delbo entrusted her friend Rosette Lamont, who translated Auschwitz and After, with a message:

Although I did not know it at once, I came to the realization that I wrote this text so that people might envision what *l'univers concentrationnaire* was like. Of course it wasn't 'like' anything one had ever known. It was profoundly, utterly 'unlike.' And so, I knew I had to raise before the eyes

of a future reader the hellish image of a death camp: senseless killing labor, pre-dawn roll calls lasting for hours, death-directed minute-by-minute, programming. We were made to stand for hours on end in the snow, on ice, envying those of our companions who had died that night in the bunks they shared with us. I hope that these texts will make the reoccurrence of this horror impossible. This is my dearest wish. (Lamont 2)

Despite her desire for the reader to imagine and visualize “l’univers concentrationnaire,”<sup>2</sup> Delbo openly questions the limit of the reader’s level of comprehension by deliberately inserting the word “might” in “people might envision” (Lamont 2). Her inclusion of the word “might” emphasizes both the possibility and the uncertainty of the reader’s capability to “see,” which simultaneously invites the reader to witness her experience and removes the reader as an active witness. Delbo questions the reader’s role as a witness because of the reader’s inability to completely conceive “what l’univers concentrationnaire was like” (2); the reader cannot entirely imagine or understand Delbo’s experience within Auschwitz due to the insufficiency of language to describe the complexity of her physical experience. As a constructed framework, language possesses distinct boundaries that constrict the freedom of communicating a traumatic experience that severely impacts the body. Physical trauma exceeds the constructed boundaries of language because language fails to provide a means of describing the extent and degree of the prisoners’ bodily breakdown in Auschwitz. Due to the fact that she did not live through Auschwitz, the reader cannot comprehend Delbo’s excruciating physical breakdown as it exceeds all referents of pain that the reader currently knows. Thus, Delbo

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<sup>2</sup> The term “l’univers concentrationnaire,” or “concentrationary universe,” first appeared in David Rousset’s book L’Univers Concentrationnaire. “L’univers concentrationnaire” describes all of the various features of the Nazi operation, such as murder and starvation, that were used to attain the final goal of total annihilation (Ezrahi 10).

cannot fully communicate her traumatic experience in Auschwitz as it exceeds the boundaries of the reader's linguistic framework.

Delbo understands the difficulty of describing her experience within the reader's linguistic system as she uses the word "like" to describe "l'univers concentrationnaire" (Lamont 2). Both Delbo and the reader possess vastly different linguistic frameworks—Delbo's deriving from the Holocaust and the reader's originating from a pre-Holocaust society. In the reader's pre-Holocaust language, the word "like" commonly associates two similar entities with one another. However, because her physical experience in the Holocaust lies outside of the reader's language and, therefore, cannot be equated with any other experience, Delbo must redefine the word "like" in terms of its opposite, "unlike." By redefining the word in terms of its negative counterpart, Delbo mimics the way in which the Nazis wrenched language, but for the opposite purpose. The Nazis used words that had positive connotations and redefined them by their inverse in order to deceive the prisoners of their coming fates. The Nazis took a common word such as "selection," which the prisoners originally defined as the act of choosing or being chosen from among a group to receive recognition or a reward, and reclassified the word so that the term "selection" now described the process by which the Nazis decided the fate of the prisoners. If he was "selected" in a concentration camp, the prisoner was chosen to die in the gas chamber. While the Nazis utilized language as a form of mass deception, Delbo ironically exposes the malleability of language to allow the reader to see and understand her Auschwitz experience. Because the reader emerges from a pre-Holocaust world and, therefore, has never experienced such linguistic deception, Delbo must redefine the word "like," meaning similar, in terms of "unlike," meaning different, in order to capture the

deception that occurred during the Holocaust. Therefore, Delbo strips the word “like” of its former referent, which both disrupts the ordinariness of the reader’s language and distances the reader from her individual experience.

Delbo undertakes a difficult task in attempting to describe her Auschwitz experience as she must destabilize the reader’s pre-Holocaust language to demonstrate its malleability and, thus, instability. Primo Levi, a survivor of Auschwitz and the Holocaust, argues “that the Lager’s German was a language apart: to say it precisely, [...] it was tied to the place and time” (*The Drowned and the Saved* 97). The “Lager’s German,” or the German of the concentration camps that the Nazis employed, exploited the arbitrariness of language in order to oppress the prisoners. The Nazis devised euphemisms to trick the prisoners by taking ordinary words and reshaping their meanings so that a once normal word now decided whether a prisoner lived or died. The euphemisms created a deadly subterfuge for everyday words, such as “showers,” so that no matter what language a prisoner spoke, the new meaning of the word “showers,” gas chambers, became universally known within concentration camps; however, the reader’s pre-Holocaust language associates “showers” with cleanliness. Due to the differences that emerge between the associations and definitions among identical words, Delbo cannot rely on the reader’s pre-Holocaust language to describe the devastating and terrifying effects that language had on its victims. Therefore, Delbo must create a method that enables the reader to approach understanding by visualizing her emotional and psychological agony in Auschwitz.

Delbo develops a new form of narration that combines a sequence of non-linear, fragmented vignettes in order to allow the reader to envision a drastic and seemingly

incomprehensible world. Her structure employs both sequential and disjointed vignettes that momentarily place the reader within her representational vision of Auschwitz. Because the vignettes do not always appear in chronological order, the reader often cannot foretell the struggles that she will have to encounter with Delbo, which transforms the reader into a similar victim of randomness as the prisoners in Auschwitz. As Thomas Trezise, a scholar of French literature, claims, “among the most effective weapons wielded by the Nazis was randomness itself, which undermines whatever capacity for self-protective foresight might have been developed by their victims” (Trezise 862). The prisoners had no way of protecting themselves from death due to the Nazis’ unpredictability. In order to demonstrate the power of such unpredictability, Delbo neglects to frame or contextualize her vignettes; instead, she thrusts the reader into the described episode and quickly pulls the reader from the event. As a result, the reader not only obtains a seemingly realistic glimpse of Delbo’s life in Auschwitz but also encounters and witnesses the Nazis’ exploitation of arbitrary randomness.

Delbo begins her memoir with this strategy of randomness by opening with a vignette, entitled “Arrivals, Departures.” In “Arrivals, Departures,” Delbo momentarily constructs an ordinary scene from the reader’s present in order to demonstrate the conceptual discord between the reader’s current world and Delbo’s concentration camp universe. She begins by visually describing the reader’s common expectations in a present-day train station:

People arrive. They look through the crowd of those who are waiting, those who await them. They kiss them and say the trip exhausted them.

People leave. They say good-bye to those who are not leaving and hug the children.

There is a street for people who arrive and a street for people who leave. There is a café called ‘Arrivals’ and a café called ‘Departures.’

There are people who arrive and people who leave. (Delbo 3)

In this description, Delbo relies on the repetition of the words “arrive/arrival” and “leave/departure” in order to illustrate those who come from those who go. The initial distinction between those who arrive and those who depart is normalized and commonly experienced in the reader’s present society. Therefore, the reader begins the memoir in a known and comfortable environment, when, all of a sudden, Delbo randomly thrusts the reader into an unknown, horrific world.

But there is a station where those who arrive are those who are leaving  
a station where those who arrive have never arrived, where those who  
have left never came back.

It is the largest station in the world. (Delbo 3)

Delbo’s style of quickly sending the reader into the concentration camp universe breaks the reader’s current frame of reference, which allows the reader to become a closer witness to the deadly transportation system. Due to this sudden shift in the physical and emotional settings, Elizabeth Scheiber, a scholar of Holocaust literature, acknowledges that “the reader is flung into the book in a similar manner that deportees arrived at Auschwitz. Time is unmarked, and Auschwitz remains unnamed” (Scheiber 3). In this unnamed, new world that is Auschwitz, the distinction between arrivals and departures becomes minimized as the two classifications become intertwined to mean one likely outcome, death. In this station, the arrivals are the departures, and Delbo clarifies this lack of distinction by titling the vignette “Arrivals, Departures” rather than “Arrivals and Departures.” Therefore, she displaces and redefines the reader’s pre-Holocaust referents of the words “arrivals” and “departures” so that the reader can comprehend the destruction that occurs at “the largest station in the world” (Delbo 3). The reader now

infers that there is only one way to depart for those who arrive in Auschwitz — through the chimney.

Delbo chooses the title “Arrivals, Departures” in order to establish the loss of distinction between the figurative and literal fates of those who arrived in Auschwitz. Rather than using a totalizing and impersonal word, such as “no one,” to describe the outcome of the people on the transport cars, Delbo artistically illustrates the victims in intricate detail so that the reader can picture the event:

There are married couples who stepped out of the synagogue the bride all in white wrapped in her veil wrinkled from having slept on the floor of the cattle car

The bridegroom in black wearing a top hat his gloves soiled  
parents and guests, women holding pearl-embroidered handbags all of them regretting they could have stopped home to change into something less dainty

The rabbi holds himself straight, heading the line. He has always been a model for the rest.

There are boarding school-girls wearing identical pleated skirts, their hats trailing blue ribbons. (Delbo 6)

In this visual description, Delbo juxtaposes the wedding that the passengers are supposed to experience with the concentration camp to create a jarring effect for the reader. She stylistically illuminates the insurmountable grief that overtakes the usually joyful occasion of a wedding by omitting punctuation. The lack of punctuation visually illustrates the loss of distinction between the wedding party, rabbi, and school-girls; no one is differentiated. Thus, Delbo illustrates a non-confining, limitless grief that does not normally dominate the atmosphere of a wedding. The wedding between the bride and groom is supposed to mark the beginning to the rest of their lives; instead, Delbo frames the scene by showing the couple’s violent reposition to a death factory. At this moment, Delbo asserts that arriving in Auschwitz is the beginning to the end of their lives, with

their ends taking place inside the crematorium. Therefore, Delbo obliterates the normal reference of a wedding ceremony as the scene becomes suffocated by the desecration of the concentration camp setting.

Delbo continues to list the men, women, and children of all professions to display the Nazis' willingness to kill everyone. However, Delbo's intricate detailing of each type of passenger personalizes the victims' existence to the reader. She gives each victim a face and an individual identity, which forces the reader to bear witness to the brutality of genocide. By giving the prisoners their own identities, Delbo allows the reader to emotionally invest in the victims' well-being, which causes the reader to hope for their survival. But as soon as she creates a connection between the reader and the victims, Delbo quickly strips the reader of any remaining hope:

A band will be dressed in the girls' pleated skirts. The camp commandant wishes Viennese waltzes to be played every Sunday morning.

A blockhova will cut homey curtains from the holy vestments worn by the rabbi to celebrate the Sabbath no matter what, in whatever place.

A kapo will masquerade by donning the bridegroom's morning coat and top hat, with her girlfriend wrapped in the bride's veil. They'll play 'wedding' all night while the prisoners, dead tired, lie in their bunks. (Delbo 8)

The vision of the garments suggests a violent and unconventional cultural and linguistic redefinition of the clothes. The pleated skirts, sacred vestment, and wedding garments do not merely represent ordinary clothes; they symbolize cultural conventions, traditions, and identities. While the top hat, morning coat, and veil represent the joyousness of a wedding ceremony, the vestments symbolize religious sanctity. Therefore, the clothes assume a cultural identity, which establishes a person's individuality. Yet, by portraying the garments in the Nazis' possession, Delbo demonstrates how the Nazis rob the prisoners of their cultural identity and individuality. Having once signified a person's



individuality, the term “clothes” now displays how the Nazis erased the victims’ identities. The victims no longer exercise control over their own identities, causing them to experience social and cultural deaths in which they cannot distinguish themselves from the other prisoners. The Blockhova overlooks and disgraces the spiritual dignity of the Jewish culture by shamelessly shredding the rabbi’s garments to make drapes. However, the rabbi’s vestments not only portray a cultural identity but also act as a spiritual symbol for the entire Jewish religion. The image of the Blockhova disgracing the vestments becomes devastating for the reader as she bears witness to the destruction of the Jewish culture’s most sacred figures and symbols.

In order to steal the prisoners’ identities without rebellion, the Nazi commandants forced the band to play upbeat music to trick the prisoners into thinking they were safe. In her vignette entitled “The Orchestra,” Delbo illustrates the extent to which the Nazis deceived their prisoners. She explains, “when the new arrivals stepped out of the boxcars to proceed, in rank formation, to the gas chamber, [the new commandant] loved it to be to the rhythm of a merry march” (Delbo 106). By having the orchestra play a merry song, the Nazi commandant exploited the original function of music to serve as a form of relative deception. The deception thrived on the prisoners’ inability to fathom the reality of the concentration camp system, which starved, overworked, murdered, and burned the bodies of its victims. In addition, the Nazis enjoyed the prisoners’ fear and lack of knowledge of their imminent deaths. By illustrating the Nazi commandant’s love for murdering prisoners, Delbo juxtaposes the atrocious life of the prisoners within the death camp to the joyous life of the Nazi officers. Because she uses the word “loved” to

describe the Nazi commandant's feeling of murder, Delbo illuminates Nazi sadism in hopes of allowing the reader to visualize the boundless degree of Nazi atrocity.

Delbo not only shows Nazi deception within the concentration camps but also allows the reader to visualize a similar form of deception in the vignette entitled "Tulip." Waiting to find out their next work assignment, Delbo and the other prisoners embark on an unknown path, in the middle of winter, and wonder, "what work awaited us? Marshes, hand trucks, bricks, sand. We could not think of these words without losing heart" (Delbo 60). Delbo describes the utter despair that surrounds the words "brick," "sand," "hand trucks," and "marshes" in order to display her feelings of utter misery and desolation. Then, she comes across the beauty of a tulip that remains in the window of a house and describes her amazement at seeing a beautiful flower:

...here, in a desert of ice and snow, a tulip. Pink between two pale leaves. We look at it. We forget the stinging hail. [...]

All day we dreamed of the tulip. The melted snow fell, adhered to the back of our soaked stiff jackets. The day was long, as long as all our days. Down at the bottom of the ditch we were digging, the tulip's delicate corolla bloomed. (Delbo 61)

In a world where she must expect the worst in order to prepare herself to survive, Delbo does not anticipate the tulip's presence, which allows her to draw strength from the idea and vision of the flower's attractiveness. This specific day stands out because for the first time in a long while, she and the prisoners have faith in the tulip as she expresses, "we experienced a moment of hope" (61). Because this inkling of hope and optimism derives from an image, the prisoners are led to believe that the Nazis cannot steal this moment of levity that never has existed in Auschwitz.

However, the tulip becomes a weapon of cruel irony when Delbo realizes that the house that inhabits the tulip "belonged to the SS in charge of the fishery" (Delbo 61);

now the prisoners “despised this memory and the tender feeling which had not yet dried up within us” (61). The tulip that once stood for hope now is associated with the ugliness of the Nazis. Both the prisoners and Delbo experience the jarring effects of the deceptive beauty as the tulip now stands for boundless imprisonment; after all, it is incarcerated behind the window. After falsely associating this tulip in Auschwitz with a normal tulip in her linguistic framework, the reader comes to the disturbing realization that beauty can still coexist with the inhumane. Yet, the tulip represents a cruel beauty as it is meant for someone else’s enjoyment; thus, it ironically becomes complicit in Nazi deception as it misleads the prisoners into feeling a moment of optimism. When they find out that the tulip belongs to a Nazi, the prisoners feel an ultimate and devastating loss of comfort and hope.

By falsely believing in the representation of the tulip, Delbo experienced an insurmountable pain and devastation that the reader cannot comprehend completely. Therefore, Delbo attempts to obliterate the boundaries between herself and the reader by describing her unfathomable experience in Auschwitz in one of her untitled poetic vignettes. Delbo’s poem reads:

O you who know  
 did you know that hunger makes the eyes sparkle that thirst dims them  
 O you who know  
 did you know that you can see your mother dead  
 and not shed a tear [...]  
 Did you know that the stones of the road do not weep  
 that there is one word only for dread  
 one for anguish  
 Did you know that suffering is limitless  
 that horror cannot be circumscribed  
 Did you know this  
 You who know. (Delbo 11)

Delbo directly questions the reader's capabilities in her repeated rhetorical statement, "O you who know" (11), in which Delbo, herself, implies that the reader's answer always is negative. The reader cannot "know" the devastation experienced in Auschwitz because language is incapable of fully communicating the complexity of the concentration camp system. Delbo explains the limitations of language by stating, "there is one word only for dread/ one for anguish" (11). She demonstrates the limitations of language as both the reader's pre-Holocaust language and her own post-Holocaust language use the same exact words to describe two immeasurably different experiences. Delbo's experience of terror and suffering in Auschwitz does not compare with the reader's preconception of fear and pain. She must nonetheless use these mundane words to discuss an experience that vastly surpasses the reader's pre-Holocaust definitions of them. Due to the limitations of language, Delbo asserts that the reader must look beyond the words and rely on the lack of punctuation in order to visualize the total destruction of Auschwitz.

Delbo does not merely tell the reader "that suffering is limitless" (11), but illustrates the immeasurable effects of suffering by omitting all punctuation in the poem. Punctuation marks a clear beginning and end to a given idea; however, rather than ending a line with a punctuation mark to close the statement, Delbo allows the words to fall into the white space of the page—an endless void of nothingness. For example, she repeatedly uses the word "know" as the last term in several lines and as the final word in the poem to display how knowledge transforms into the unspeakable and the unknown. By continuously ending with the word "know," Delbo expresses the importance of knowledge; however, by having the word "know" trail off into the white space of the page, she demonstrates the impossibility of completely understanding the Holocaust

reality. As Primo Levi explains, “those who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about it or have returned mute. The destruction brought to an end, the job completed, was not told by anyone, just as no one ever returned to describe his own death” (Drowned 83-84). The survivors did not personally experience death and thus cannot know, describe, or communicate the process of losing one’s life. Because she cannot speak for those who did not survive, Delbo allows this knowledge to remain unspoken but permits the reader to feel the overwhelming devastation by not syntactically confining “you who know,” or those who perished in the Holocaust. Thus, Delbo obliterates linguistic boundaries by neglecting to use punctuation so that the reader can “see” the effects of limitless suffering.

Delbo also enables the reader to visualize and understand the Holocaust by communicating the greatest agony of all—thirst. The vignette entitled “Thirst” exemplifies the difficulty of describing the meaning of the word “thirst” using the reader’s pre-Holocaust language.

Thirst is an explorer’s tale, you know, in the books we read as children. It takes place in the desert. Those who see mirages and walk in the direction of an elusive oasis suffer from thirst for three whole days. This is the pathetic chapter of the book. At the end of that chapter, a caravan bringing provisions appears; it had lost its way on trails erased by sand storms. The explorers pierce the goatskin bottles and they drink. They drink and their thirst is quenched. This is the thirst experienced in the sun, the drying wind. The desert. (Delbo 70)

Delbo begins the vignette by establishing thirst as an “explorer’s tale,” thereby presenting thirst as a self-inflicted, momentary inconvenience. Explorers seek enjoyable adventures where they usually travel to an interesting place in order to discover specific details about the surrounding atmosphere and lifestyle; however, because Delbo refers to it as a “tale,” the exploration remains fictional and possesses a distinct beginning and end. Within the

“tale,” Delbo asserts that this specific type of thirst is nothing more than an ordinary and temporary inconvenience. Therefore, the reader knows and understands this specific type of thirst as it occurs in common fairytale books. By classifying the explorer’s tale as a children’s book, Delbo allows the reader to foretell that in the end, the thirst will be quenched to create a final happily ever after.

Delbo continues to illustrate the fictional aspects of the explorer’s tale by alluding to the explorer as a person who “suffers from thirst for three whole days.” The insertion of the word “whole” causes the statement to have a sarcastic undertone so that the reader feels Delbo’s contempt for a thirst that only lasts three days; Delbo appears to envy this type of thirst because it can be “quenched.” Yet, she calls the tale “pathetic” due to the fact that the tale provides an unrealistic glimpse of what it means to “suffer from thirst.” In Delbo’s mind, going without water for three days does not amount to “suffering from thirst” when compared to the thirst that she experienced in Auschwitz. However, pre-Holocaust language does not provide Delbo with an alternative for separating and describing her suffering from the explorer’s mere discomfort. Therefore, she creates a way to bypass the limitations of language so the reader can comprehend thirst amidst concentration camps. Delbo strips the word “thirst” of its former referent by taking the reader’s known understanding of its meaning and undoing the image so that she can explain her own experience of a searing and relentless thirst.

The thirst that Delbo experiences goes beyond all fictional examples of the word “thirst” due to its unbearable power over the body and mind:

But the thirst of the marsh is more searing than that of the desert. The marsh thirst lasts for weeks. The goatskin gourds never arrive. Reason begins to waver. It is crushed by thirst. Reason is able to overcome most

everything, but it succumbs to thirst. No mirages in the marsh, no hope of an oasis. Just mud, slime. Mud and not a drop of water. (Delbo 70)

Delbo informs the reader that the thirst she experiences specifically relates to the concentration camps, and this thirst drastically surpasses and exceeds the reader's own knowledge of the term. Primo Levi attests to the power of thirst by explaining that it "is more imperative than hunger: hunger obeys the nerves, grants remission, can be temporarily obliterated by an emotion, a pain, a fear [...]; not so with thirst, which does not give respite" (Drowned 79). A thirst such as Delbo's became so overwhelming and omnipotent that it caused the prisoners to lose their sense of reason. Apart from human beings, no other living creature on earth has the ability to reason; therefore, reason is a distinct human trait.

She demonstrates the deadly effects that occur when a prisoner loses the ability to reason by declaring that all that remains is "just mud, slime. Mud and not a drop of water" (70). Delbo's reiteration of the word "mud" illustrates the ubiquitous nature of the only wet substance within the concentration camps. As a mixture of water and earth, mud is the epitome of an unclean and unclear environment. Therefore, the mud stands as a symbol of impurity, which allows the reader to understand that nothing in fact is uncontaminated and untainted within Auschwitz. The only other instance in which a person becomes surrounded by mud is within a grave. Therefore, death becomes the prisoners' only hope for an end to the seemingly invincible power of thirst due to the absence of "mirages in the marsh, no hope of an oasis" (70). The impact of the thirst that Delbo experienced not only caused insurmountable pain but also forced her to explore and tread the fine line between life and death

Even though she survives her experience of thirst, Delbo reflects on the concentration camp thirst that prevents verbal communication but permits written contact, which both forces its victims to encounter death and preserves the possibility of creating human interactions. By refusing to provide the prisoners with adequate amounts of liquid, the Nazis deprived the prisoners of language and communication, thus causing the prisoners to experience a social death:

Is this what it means to be dead? Lips try to speak but the mouth is paralyzed. A mouth cannot form words when it is dry, with no saliva. [...] The muscles of the mouth want to attempt articulation and do not articulate. Such is the despair of the powerlessness that grips me, the full awareness of the state of being dead. (Delbo 70)

Here, Delbo begins by asking the reader a rhetorical question, “is this what it means to be dead?” (70), to which the reader’s lack of knowledge prevents her from giving an adequate answer. Due to the reader’s inability to respond, Delbo visually illustrates the sheer power that thirst has over the prisoner by breaking down the body into individual pieces; the lips and the mouth become separate entities, as the dry mouth prevents the lips from communicating. Lea Hamaoui, a Holocaust scholar, argues that Delbo “records the ways that the body in extremity begins to experience itself in its parts, the way that the parts no longer seem to be part of a whole. The way that vitality gives way to numbness and the mind itself seems to shut down” (Hamaoui 253). A person relies on both the mouth and the lips to speak; by representing the lips and the mouth as separate body parts, Delbo illustrates the inability of the prisoners to verbally communicate with one another. Due to their inability to communicate, the prisoners no longer can rely on the other victims to maintain their humanity and forces them to encounter “the state of being dead” (Delbo 70).



Similarly, Delbo visually illustrates that cold weather causes a collective bodily collapse in the vignette entitled “Morning:”

Neck drawn into her shoulders, chest pulled in, each places her hands under the arms of the one in front of her. Since they cannot do it in the first row, we rotate. Backs to chests, we stand pressed against each other, yet, as we establish a single circulatory system, we remain frozen through and through. Annihilated by the cold. Feet, these remote and separate extremities, cease to exist. Shoes stay wet from yesterday’s and all yesterday’s snow and mud. They never dry. (Delbo 63)

Delbo does not depict each individual prisoner’s body but rather portrays all of the prisoners as one entity containing one functioning circulatory system. She demonstrates that each prisoner cannot survive on her own and must look to the other victims for support; the prisoners place their “hands under the arms of the one in front [...] Since they cannot do it in the first row, we rotate” (63). By helping each other survive, they create “a single circulatory system” (63); however, the system remains “frozen through and through” (63). The blood figuratively becomes frozen and cannot circulate throughout the collective body. The inability of the circulation of blood will cause the prisoners to feel as if their bodies remain in pieces rather than one functioning system and, ultimately, will result in the prisoners’ final deaths.

Delbo illustrates how easily the concentration camp cold weather can break down the prisoners’ collective bodily system by depicting the body as individual parts rather than as a whole. She notes that the neck, shoulders, chest, hands, arms, and chests, continue to exist while inside of the body, the circulatory system becomes “annihilated by the cold” (63). By metaphorically obliterating the circulatory system, which is the foundation to life, Delbo asserts that the prisoners were not classified among the living but among the dead. She continues with the notion that the prisoners were more dead than

alive by declaring that the feet “cease to exist” (63), showing the figurative destruction of the outer body’s foundation. The feet are the primary bases that support the entire body and enable transportation. If the feet “cease to exist,” then the entire body collapses and can no longer flee from death. Delbo illustrates a dual breakdown of the body’s inner framework, the circulatory system, and its outer foundation, the feet, in order to demonstrate the prisoners’ collective state of being more dead than alive.

While she focuses on the breakdown of body parts to portray the extent of the cold weather, Delbo concentrates on a Jewish woman’s hand, in the vignette entitled “Dialogue,” in order to communicate death. In the end, the smoke that derives from the crematorium overtakes the visual scene and becomes the real unspoken dialogue of the vignette. The dialogue advances as follows:

‘You’re French?’  
 ‘Yes.’  
 ‘So am I.’  
 She has no F on her chest. A star. [...]  
 ‘Oh, come on, it’s the same odds for both of us.’  
 ‘For us, there’s no hope.’  
 She [the Jewish woman] gestures with her hand, mimics rising smoke.  
 ‘We’ve got to keep up our courage.’  
 ‘Why bother... Why keep on struggling when all of us are to ...’  
 The gesture of her hand completes her sentence. Rising smoke.  
 [...] The chimney smokes. The sky is low. Smoke sweeps across the  
 camp weighing upon us and enveloping us with the odor of burning flesh.  
 (15-16)

The meanings of the “F” and the “star” mark a vast distinction between the two women and their fates, despite their similar French backgrounds. The star, which represents the yellow Star of David that all of the Jews wore, makes survival for the Jewish woman less probable as the smoke around her is filled predominantly with Jewish bodies. The Jewish woman does not describe her imminent fate using verbal language as her hand gestures

evoke a more powerful and disturbing truth, that the Jewish woman most likely will be amidst the smoke. Therefore, the impending death marks the end of verbal language but still allows the Jewish woman to communicate through gestures until the smoke overtakes the scene.

The smoke, which is created from the victims' bodies, marks the end to all dialogue as it invades and overpowers those who still live. When the "gesture of [the Jewish woman's] hand completes her sentence," the smoke continues to rise. Therefore, the smoke extinguishes language and communication and slowly overtakes what is left of life. It begins to "sweep across the camp weighing upon [them] and enveloping [them] with the odor of burning flesh" (16). By invading the lives of the surviving prisoners, the smoke blurs the boundaries and distinctions between life and death. By the end of the scene, the smoke becomes the only dialogue that is important as it smothers those who are still living and serves as a constant visual reminder of the frightful outcome that awaits many of the prisoners.

While she uses hand gestures to communicate death, Delbo disrupts the continuity of language in the vignette entitled "Sunday" by writing in the style of a stream of consciousness to convey the repetitive and grueling work they experienced. Although Sarah Liu, who works as a Research Scholar for the Center for Jewish Studies, asserts that Delbo's traumatic state causes her to lose "the sense of boundaries that define context" so that "only a word heap remains" (Liu 326), Delbo progressively breaks down the linguistic structure to demonstrate the prisoners' actual experience of working on Sundays. Furthermore, the structure of language in "Sunday" becomes as traumatic as the Nazi commands themselves. Delbo begins by describing, to the best of her ability, her

dreadful experience that occurs on “the day everyone feared the most,” Sunday (Delbo 90):

Run to the gate, pass under whips and lashes, cross the swaying, sagging plank. Careful of the cane of the chief SS, standing at the outer end of the plank. Empty your apron under a rake, run, pass through the gate along the narrowing passage—the club-wielders press close together at the exit—run to the men to pick up two shovelfuls of earth, run to the gate, in an uninterrupted circuit. (Delbo 91)

She begins with a detailed account of her experience so that the reader can draw on the context of her work that occurs on Sundays. Delbo not only has to endure physically taxing tasks, such as running and shoveling, but also must perform quickly in order to avoid the Nazi commanders’ physical brutality.

By giving the foundation of her work experience, Delbo allows the reader to visualize the speed and harshness of the commands that the prisoners experienced when performing their duties:

Run to the gate—schnell—pass through—weiter—teeter on the plank above the ditch—schneller—empty our aprons—run—watch out for the barbed wire—the gate again—there is always one you step on where the officer stands, armed with his cane—run toward the men—stretch out our aprons—blows—race toward the gate. A maniacal run. (Delbo 92)

Delbo removes the majority of the adjectives so that the imperatives are the only words left in the sequence. By solely listing the commands, Delbo familiarizes the reader with the rapid and repetitive process of her Sunday labor that has devastating effects on the mind. She no longer separates the actions with commas, which allows the reader to pause momentarily, but inserts dashes in order to display a syntactical quickness that mimics the speed of the labor itself.

By using dashes rather than commas to surround the commands, Delbo emphasizes the imperatives as she continues the fragmented description:

Run. Go over the shaking plank that keeps on bending more and more—  
 schnell—pour out the earth—schnell—the gate—schnell—fill our apron—  
 schnell—the gate again—schnell—the plank. A maniacal run. (93)

These imperatives that Delbo employs appear to mimic the commands that the Nazis used while the prisoners completed their mandated work. Delbo demonstrates the Nazis' total control and power over the prisoners' actions and bodies by utilizing the German command "schnell," meaning "quickly." The word "schnell," which once appeared to have an innocent association, now establishes a violent and deadly undertone. In addition, by using a German word, Delbo disrupts the continuity of the French language. The insertion of a German word portrays that the Nazis, not the prisoners, gained control over language, which further diminished the humanity of the prisoners.

Delbo further illustrates the prisoners' loss of control by displaying their present madness:

Run—schnell—the gate—schnell—the plank—empty out the earth—  
 schnell—barbed wire—schnell—the gate—schnell—run—apron—run—  
 run run run schnell schnell schnell schnell schnell. A maniacal run. (94)

With each rendition of her depleting stream of consciousness, Delbo repeats the phrase "a maniacal run" (94). The phrase determines that the prisoners no longer function as ordinary humans because their difficult labor and inhumane living conditions have caused them to enter a state of complete madness. Though Delbo considers the prisoners "mad," the prisoners still are able to follow the Nazis' orders in hopes of maintaining their survival. Therefore, this overwhelming figurative madness derives from her syntax, which has broken down completely since her initial fragmented quotation. Though the remaining imperatives appear illogical and incomprehensible, the reader can understand the meaning of "run—schnell—the gate..." and becomes so accustomed to the repetitive

process that the reader can remember the exact context of the experience. By transcribing the trauma within the structure of her language, Delbo allows the reader to comprehend her seemingly inexpressible Auschwitz experience.

Because she uses the structure and syntax within the vignettes to demonstrate the malleability of language, Delbo visually portrays the experiences of the prisoners who suffered in Auschwitz. However, the reader's experience always is provisional; Delbo cannot convey the degree of physical hardship the prisoners endured. Conversely, she effectively reproduces the prisoners' psychological and emotional breakdowns by structurally destroying the reader's pre-Holocaust frame of reference. She combines a sequence of disjointed vignettes that destroys the reader's narrative expectation so that the reader can experience the nerveing effects of uncertainty. Though he also exploits the insecurity of language, Paul Celan does so by illustrating the destructive nature of linguistic mastery. In his "Bremen Speech," Celan speaks from a place of intention where linguistic, aesthetic, and physical mastery ruled and strives to communicate with an approachable audience. In order to communicate in an active dialogue, the audience must not only understand his Holocaust experience but also comprehend Celan's physical disorientation. In his poem "No More Sand Art," he defies Nazi mastery by allowing the reader to discover that his poetic truth has many different meanings rather than once fixed connection. Through its cryptic metaphors and rhythmical unpredictability, the poem visually and metaphorically enables the reader to identify Celan's own lack of aesthetic mastery and finally comprehend his devastating experience.

Born into a family of German-speaking Jews in 1920, Paul Antschel was living in Czernowitz, the capital of Bukovina, Ukraine, when the Nazis occupied his homeland in

1941.<sup>3</sup> On 27 June 1942, the Nazis captured Antschel's parents in their home when Paul was not there. Though many discrepancies remain as to where Antschel was on that day, John Felstiner, author of Celan's latest biography, presents evidence suggesting that Antschel went into hiding without his parents. Several other scholars have formulated the same hypothesis as to Antschel's whereabouts. Additionally, Ruth Lackner, Antschel's friend, testified to the fact that she found him hiding in a cosmetics factory after his mother refused to follow (Felstiner 14). However, other sources suggest that Antschel stayed overnight at a friend's house due to a mandated curfew, and when he returned home the following morning, the front door was sealed, the house was empty, and his parents were gone (14). Following the events of 27 June 1942, Antschel's parents died after being shipped to concentration camps. Antschel's father, Leo, died of typhus in the Michailowka camp in the fall of 1942 while his mother, Friederike, was shot in Transnistria in the winter of 1942 as the Nazi's deemed her unfit for work and summarily murdered her. Antschel, himself, survived the Holocaust, and in 1947, he changed his last name to Celan, an anagram of his name in Romanian. Unfortunately, on April 20, 1970, the same day of Hitler's birthday, Celan took his own life by drowning himself in the Seine at the age of 49, the same age as his mother when the Nazis murdered her.

Throughout her life, Friederike Antschel solely spoke a literary German that greatly differed from the impure, broken German the majority of the Bukovinian people spoke. In this respectable German, Friederike gave Celan a memorable and pleasant

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Antschel never testified to his experience during World War II. In the biographical section that appeared in a German magazine entitled *Die Wandlung* ("The Transformation"), Antschel himself wrote, "what the life of a Jew was during the war years, I need not mention" (Felstiner 59). The small amount of facts that are known about his life derive from his conversations, letters, poetry, prose, lectures, and speeches.

childhood by constantly singing songs, reading fairytales, and humming lullabies.

Michael Bernstein, a literary critic of Celan's work, asserts that "because German was the tongue chosen for him by his mother, not a given of his environment, Celan's relationship to it [...] was both more self-conscious and more charged than that of a native German for whom defining himself within the language was never open to question" (Bernstein 114). Celan felt a greater emotional connection to German because his mother, Friederike, chose to raise him in a German household. Thus, even though he settled in Paris from 1948 until his death and fluently spoke Russian, French, English, Italian, Portuguese, and Hebrew, Celan strictly chose to write poetry in German as it connected him to his childhood. Celan found refuge in his native tongue as he faced a French society that hardly appreciated his work, a German audience that proved untrustworthy, and a former homeland, Czernowitz, that barely survived the war.

However, this seemingly pure language that resonated an intimate connection to his mother also bonded Celan to the language of the Nazi murderers. German, which served as an oral and printed homage to Friederike, ironically was the same language the Nazis used in the torture of Celan's parents, along with millions of other people.

Bernstein acknowledges that

for Celan, the mother tongue stands in unbearable intimacy with the murderers' tongue, the cadences of his mother's favorite songs and fairy tales recapitulated in the rhetoric that conceived, organized, and then implemented the Final Solution. The words of the lullabies on which he was raised could never be entirely dissociated. (Bernstein 100)

The cadences and rhetoric Friederike used to raise Celan became the exact same rhythms the Nazis employed to establish and implement their system of genocide. The language that once portrayed the good and beautiful in Celan's childhood now represented



deception, torture, and murder. As previously explained in Delbo's vignette entitled "Orchestra," the Nazi commandants often deceived the new arrivals by having the camp 'orchestra' play "the rhythm of a merry march" (Delbo 106) as the newest prisoners entered the concentration camps. The 'orchestra' often played well-known music, such as waltzes, reminding the prisoners of their former homes and lives. The famous German music that Friederike once played for her son became the same music that the Nazis forced the prisoners to play when the new arrivals marched to the gas chambers. Because the same German music represented these two vastly different worlds, Celan could not linguistically distance himself from the atrocities the Nazis committed without losing the memories of his childhood, and specifically, his mother.

Ironically, Celan's first major speech on poetry, where he discussed both the abilities and limitations of the post-Holocaust German language through allusive metaphors, took place in the German city of Bremen. In his speech, given upon receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen in 1958, Celan began by giving the audience a lesson in linguistic roots:

The words 'denken' and 'danken', to think and to thank, have the same root in our language. If we follow it to 'gedenken', 'eingedenk sein', 'Andenken' and 'Andacht' we enter the semantic fields of memory and devotion. Allow me to thank you from there. (Celan 33)

He cleverly qualifies his "thank you" in its semantic field so as to reveal the irony when expressing his formal gratitude. On the one hand, Celan graciously thanks the audience for presenting him with a prestigious literature award. On the other hand, his appreciation employs a sarcastic and resentful undertone as he thanks the same German people that murdered his family, rendered him homeless, and attempted to extinguish the Jewish

culture.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the “thank you” requires the audience to remember, pay tribute, and take responsibility for the millions of lives that were lost amidst the Holocaust

He explains the semantic field that the word “thank” derives from in order to reclassify the term so that the audience associates it with a negative connotation. Similar to the way in which Delbo redefined the word “like” in terms of its inverse “unlike,” Celan strips the word “thank” of its former positive referent to display the instability of language. Rather than obtaining a positive definition as an expression of gratitude, the word “thank” now forces the audience to feel tremendous guilt for the incomprehensible destruction their country caused during the war. In addition, he specifically asks the audience to “allow me to thank you from there” (33) in which he refers to the semantic fields of memory and devotion. His memory and devotion come from the Holocaust, a place where Nazi mastery over language ruled. The Nazis exploited the arbitrariness of language by redefining words, such as shower and selection, so that they only had one meaning, gas chamber and roll call. The Nazis’ mastery of language became an effective tool in murdering millions of prisoners as it enabled them to deceive the prisoners to such a colossal degree that the prisoners did not know, and thus did not resist, their imminent deaths.

He continues to demonstrate the danger of mastering language by discussing his origins that the Nazis obliterated: “the region from which I come to you – with what detours! but then, is there such a thing as a detour? – will be unfamiliar to most of you. [...] It was a landscape where both people and books lived” (Celan 33). The beginning of Celan’s statement, “the region from which I come to you” (33), causes the audience to

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<sup>4</sup> All of these resulting conflicts of the Holocaust continue to arise throughout the Bremen Speech.

anticipate an in-depth regional description. At the moment the audience expects him to name the area, Celan abruptly deviates from the predictable regional topic in order to discuss the topic of detours. Detours often are unsettling as they diverge from the predictable and conventional norm so that the final outcome remains unknown.

Therefore, a detour acts as a side effect and, thus, presumes a normal state of mastery and intention.<sup>5</sup> Having experienced the Nazis' control of language, Celan speaks from this place of intention where mastery ruled; the audience, however, has never experienced the danger of such mastery. In order to bridge the gap between himself and the audience, Celan chronologically illustrates his experience of linguistic mastery by metaphorically portraying it in relation to specific regions.

After the brief detour, Celan begins his topographic sketch by referencing the past, where linguistic mastery did not exist: "the region from which I come to you [...] will be unfamiliar to most of you." (33). Though he never directly names the region, Celan describes it as "the home of many of the Hassidic stories which Martin Buber has retold in German. It was [...] it was a landscape where both people and books lived. There, in this former province of the Habsburg monarchy, now dropped from history" (33). Martin Buber wrote the famous essay "Ich and Du"<sup>6</sup> (1923) which argues that a person actualizes her life by two modes of communication, monologue and dialogue (Felstiner 161). Celan perhaps referred to Buber because of their agreement that language was grounded in dialogue, a view that resurfaces towards the end of the Bremen Speech. In addition, Buber, along with Celan and his parents, grew up in Ukraine. Yet, Celan is not talking about Ukraine as an entire country; instead, he gives a more detailed

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<sup>5</sup> This idea was taken from Dr. Claudia Ingram on 20 April 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Buber's title "Ich and Du" is translated as "I and Thou."

description of this unnamed region by mentioning the “former province of the Habsburg monarchy” (33). Czernowitz, formerly located in Ukraine, was the capital of the Austrian-Habsburg province of Bukovina. Celan felt a strong connection to Czernowitz because, as his pre-war homeland, it bonded him to his mother. Therefore, Czernowitz is the “region from which I come to you [...] It was a landscape where both people and books lived” (33). Neither people nor books continue to live in Czernowitz at the time he gave the Bremen Speech because his homeland did not survive the war.

Celan brings the audience to the present by announcing, “but though Bremen was brought closer through books, through the names of writers and publishers of books, it still had the sound of the unreachable” (34). As a city that survives the war, Bremen remains drastically different from Czernowitz as it does not resonate any pre-war emotional attachments for Celan. He indirectly illustrates the vast difference between the two regions by distinctly describing that “Bremen was brought closer through books, through the names of writers and publishers of books” (34). The books and people of Bremen as well as the region itself survived the war whereas nothing remained of Czernowitz. Though surviving, Bremen holds negative post-war associations for Celan that prevent him from emotionally “reaching” the region. As a city located in northwestern Germany, Bremen housed two concentration camps, Bremen-Farge and Bremen-Vegesack, during World War II. Due to the city’s active role in incarcerating, torturing, and murdering innocent victims, Celan deemed the city emotionally, not physically, “unreachable.” After all, Celan gave this acceptance speech in Bremen and, therefore, physically reaches the city. Yet, due to the city’s complicity with the Nazi

Final Solution, Bremen forever remains emotionally inaccessible because of Celan's traumatic past of witnessing the Nazis' obliteration of his hometown and his family.

As a former inhabitant of Czernowitz, Celan currently represents a homeless German Jewish poet in search of a new habitat of any kind. His constant migrations after the war, from Bucharest, to Vienna, and finally to Paris, demonstrate the difficulty he faced when attempting to consider a foreign region his home. Celan struggles to re-establish a home for himself in a seemingly foreign city that does not retain any memories of his pre-war childhood. In addition, his poetic audience renders Celan, as a Jewish poet writing in German, homeless as they cannot decipher or comprehend the meaning of his poetry. Alvin Rosenfeld, an analyst of Holocaust literature, finds the process of deciphering Celan's dense and cryptic poetry extremely difficult and challenging and, thus, argues that his poetry is not meant to communicate to the reader. Rosenfeld believes Celan's poems are "clipped and elliptical, [...] their language often intensely private and hermetic" (Rosenfeld 87). Rosenfeld explains that Celan's poems are personal and impervious, thus remaining inaccessible to the reader. Yet, Celan must write cryptic poetry to preserve polysemous words, which prevents Nazi mastery from overtaking the German language.

After establishing himself as a homeless poet, Celan continues by envisioning the future where he hopes to create a regional habitat: "within reach, though far enough, what I could aim to reach, was Vienna" (Celan 34). Before the war, the inhabitants of Czernowitz strived to move to Vienna, which they believed was sufficiently protected, because of its vibrant cultural and economic life presented for Jews. In fact, due to the architecture, newspapers, and number of Jews living in Czernowitz, the inhabitants called

their city “Little Vienna.” During the war, Germany annexed Austria, but upon Germany’s fall near the end of the war, Austria became an independent country and no longer remained associated with Germany. Around the year 1948, Celan moved to Vienna in hopes of retrieving remnants of his lost pre-war past. Because his family came from the eastern region of the Austrian empire, Celan longed to “reach” Vienna as it came to represent his spiritual home—a German-speaking city that no longer remained under Germany’s control. However, after both Nazi and Soviet occupations, Vienna remained out of reach to Celan as Austria’s mild denazification process rapidly came to an end (Felstiner 43). In 1948, the Austrian government gave all minor offenders, who helped the Nazis proceed with their Final Solution plan, absolution (Berkeley 348). Due to the Austrian government’s lack of legal action and the rising anti-Semitism in the region, Celan could no longer live in Vienna and moved to Paris. Yet, for Celan, Vienna remained “within reach, though far enough, what I could aim to reach” (34) in hopes of one day recreating and moving back to his ancestral and spiritual home.

Having explored the past, present, and future capabilities of finding a home for himself within a region, Celan begins to focus on the progression of language:

Only one thing remained reachable, close and secure amid all losses: language. Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained secure against loss. But it had to go through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence, through the thousand darknesses of murderous speech. It went through. It gave me no words for what was happening, but went through it. Went through and could resurface, ‘enriched’ by it all. (Celan 34)

When fighting for his survival in the Romanian labor camps, Celan relied on language to sustain his humanity, when in every other aspect of his life, he no longer was considered human. Writing verses within the camps gave Celan a tangible reason to continue living as it allowed him “to speak, orient myself, [and] to find out where I was” (34). Even

though the Nazis utilized it to employ their system of genocide, the German language remained “reachable, close and secure” (34) to Celan as it temporally oriented him. It prevented his mind from wavering by ensuring that he maintained his sanity, which preserved his humanity and enabled him to survive.

Celan asserts that before it could successfully orient him in the present, language had to go “through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence, through the thousand darknesses of murderous speech” (34). The Nazis often referred to the Third Reich as the Thousand-Year Reich due to Hitler’s desire for the Nazi party to rule for one thousand years. Therefore, language has to pass through the thousand darknesses, or the Thousand-Year Reich, in order to re-emerge. However, he never declares that he is referring to the German language exclusively, thus allowing the audience to question whether or not Celan might also be making a general argument about the availability of language. In this respect, “the thousand darknesses” could also reference the creation stories in the Book of Genesis: “ And God said: 'Let there be light.' And there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, one day” (Genesis 1: 3-5). Many scholars and religious advocates disagree over how long it took God to make each of the six days; while some believe that God’s creations, such as light (day) and dark (night), occurred in six consecutive twenty-four hour days, others feel that each day took one thousand years to create. By regarding it as “the thousand darknesses of murderous speech,” Celan could be spiting God and the Torah by juxtaposing God’s creations, birth, with “murderous speech,” death.

Celan does not identify the exact language he references so as to demonstrate how it is able to “resurface, ‘enriched’ by it all” (34). He allows the audience to interpret the multiple meanings that emerge when considering the word “language,” which proves that linguistic mastery does not persist in the present. After the Nazis bastardized it during the Holocaust, German was able to resurface as a more secure language since it became free of mastery. However, Celan, himself, placed quotations around the word “enriched” in order to illuminate the irony that lies within this word’s root. The term “enriched” in German, “*angereichert*,” displays the word “reich” within its letters (Felstiner 115). Celan paradoxically takes a polysemous word, enriched, and makes it monosemous, enrich-ed, which paradoxically illustrates the improvement and persistence of mastery within the German language. In addition, the biblical language also is “en-reich-ed” as the atrocity amidst the Holocaust convinced the majority of Jews to stop believing in God or the Bible. Growing up in a religious household, Celan lost faith in God during the Holocaust as he could not comprehend how the Jews’ almighty God could allow His own people to be enslaved, over-worked, starved, and brutally murdered. Thus, the biblical as well as the German languages cannot rid themselves of their pasts as the Nazis’ ability to master language is rooted within various languages.

Though containing remnants of the Nazi past, language not only enables Celan to orient himself in the present but also gives him hope that he will be able to connect to others in the future. Near the end of his Bremen speech, Celan demonstrates his desire to reach an approachable other:

A poem, being an instance of language, hence essentially dialogue, may be a letter in a bottle thrown out to sea with the—surely not always strong—hope that it may somehow wash up somewhere, perhaps on a



shoreline of the heart. In this way, too, poems are *en route*: they are headed toward.

Toward what? Toward something open, inhabitable, an approachable you, perhaps, an approachable reality. (Celan 34-35)

Celan's poetry, as well as his prose speeches, strive to create a dialogue between himself and the audience in hopes of establishing a human connection through language. By attempting to recreate a "thou," poetry becomes a method of refuting aesthetic mastery, which once obliterated the possibility of address and, thus, prevented Celan from establishing an approachable other. Celan's language, which employs cryptic metaphors, prevents poetic mastery because the reader of his poetry cannot identify solely one meaning from the polysemous words. Yet, his difficult metaphors both hinder and create dialogue, depending on the reader. In order to understand the meaning of the poem, the reader must create a connection between the metaphor and Celan's experience. Because she must interpret the meaning of the metaphor, the reader establishes her own perspective, thereby creating her own connection to the poem and Celan. Oftentimes Celan's metaphors are extremely allusive, which prevents certain readers from comprehending the meaning of the poem. Because not all of his readers can understand his poetry, Celan establishes a more powerful connection between himself and individual readers as the meaning of the poem lies within the readers' minds rather than merely on the page.

Though he strives to communicate through his poetry, Celan cannot always establish a connection with his readers. He, thus, describes his poetry as "a letter in a bottle thrown out to sea with the [...] hope that it may somehow wash up somewhere" (35). By portraying his poem as "a letter in a bottle," Celan ensures that his poetry moves toward the German audience "with the—surely not always strong—hope that it may

somehow wash up” on the German heartland in the future (35). Through his poetic language, Celan seeks to regenerate an approachable German audience that both listens and understands his desperate attempt to communicate his traumatic experience. At the same moment that he seeks to establish dialogue, Celan simultaneously employs the same metaphor to regenerate the German language by demonstrating how the visual image creates many different meanings. He uses the metaphor, “a letter in a bottle” (35), in order to pay tribute to Osip Mandelshtam (Felstiner 116). Osip Mandelshtam was a silenced poet who wrote an essay entitled, “On the Interlocutor,” in 1913. In his essay, Mandelshtam envisions a person strolling along the sand dunes and discovering a letter, with a poet’s name and fate, inside a bottle (Felstiner 116). Because he believed that Mandelshtam died in Hitler’s Russian campaign in 1941, Celan pays tribute to the silenced poet by giving language back to him (116). Thus, Celan prevents aesthetic mastery by illustrating that a metaphor can reference a historical reference and a personal objective simultaneously.

Because his poetry and prose seek an approachable other, Celan affirms his work is “not in the least hermetic” (Felstiner 253). He defends his poetry as he feels it directly expresses and represents reality and, thus, aspires to be understood by the reader. Yet, despite his public confirmations that his poetic works strive to create a dialogue with the reader, Celan still had to defend his poetry and prose speeches against skeptical critics. In 1957, a German journal published an article that described a German high school class’s experience when trying to analyze “Todesfuge,” Celan’s most famous poem to date (Felstiner 118). “Todesfuge” is told from the point of view of the Jewish prisoners that are being tyrannized by a camp commandant. The poem contains overtly musical

rhythms, intensifying cadences, and surreal images that often conflict with the disturbing representation of life within a concentration camp. The poem begins: “black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening / we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night / we drink and we drink” (Felstiner 31).<sup>7</sup> As the first line of all four stanzas, the ghastly act of drinking black milk not only destroys the health and bones of an adult prisoner’s body but also prevents reproduction from occurring as the milk, or livelihood of a baby, is polluted. Thus, the metaphor “black milk” taints the nourishment that is vital to mankind.

Yet, Felstiner rightly acknowledges that “black milk” may not be a metaphor at all as the prisoners could have been given a substance that they called “black milk” (33); if this fact is correct, then the concentration camp reality overtakes the surreal (33). Celan purposefully has the rhythm of the poem derive from the repetition of the word “drink” in order to highlight the devastating truth within the poem. In many concentration camps, the Nazi commanders made prisoners sing nostalgic songs while the other prisoners used all of their strength to dig graves. In this instance, the reader adapts to the compelling musicality of the rhythm, “black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening / we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night” (31), which amounts to the inescapable cycle of the fugue of death. While the reader adapts to the musical rhythm, the Jewish prisoners drink black milk, by which they are slowly killing their bodies and, thus, digging their own graves.

Yet, the German high school students’ responses to this poem, which the teacher classified as intelligent analyses, feature comments on “theme, countertheme, motif, repetition, variation, modulation, and coda” (Felstiner 118) but neglect to discuss the

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<sup>7</sup> All of Celan’s poems that are presented in this paper were translated into English by John Felstiner.

actual point of the entire poem—what the prisoners' lives were like in concentration camps. The students were analyzing the poem's musical and surreal images without understanding what the poem was about. After listening to the class's discoveries, the teacher asked the students if they felt that "Todesfuge" was an accusation; in response, the class unanimously replied that they felt Celan's poem was "just the opposite—forgiveness and reconciliation" (118). The students might have thought that the poem attempted to resolve the postwar division between Germans and Jews by misinterpreting the final two lines: "dein goldenes Haar Margarete / dein aschenes Haar Sulamith." The motifs of Margarete, a German woman with blonde hair, and Sulamith, a Jewish woman with ashen hair, consistently shadow one another for the duration of the poem, but these final two lines conjoin the female personas. The German students most likely interpreted the joining of Margarete and Sulamith as a reconciliation because the final couplets appear to unite the women. However, Felstiner argues that the images of Margarete and Sulamith undercut each other (40); taking Felstiner's analysis one-step further, I would argue that Celan unites the women in the end to demonstrate how the simultaneity of German and Jewish ideals never will coexist. The final name and word that is declared in "Todesfuge" is "Sulamith," a Hebrew name, that Felstiner claims, still maintains her rooted identity that the Nazis attempted, but failed, to eradicate (41). To further Felstiner's analysis, I would suggest that Celan ends with the Hebrew name "Sulamith" to illustrate that the genocide that occurred in Nazi Germany could not be mastered, overcome, or reconciled. Rather than displaying a resolution between Germans and Jews, "Todesfuge" demonstrates the vast and incomparable differences between the experiences of a German and a Jew during the Holocaust.

Because many readers felt that the poem was meant to forgive the Germans for their incomprehensible actions, Celan correctly believed that his poetry “was being misused to validate an emptily sentimental and offensively aestheticized reconciliation between Germans and Jews” (Bernstein 103). Due to his strong beliefs that his poetry was getting appropriated, Celan sought to write a poem that resisted the overtly musical rhythm, repetition, and surreal images that were present in “Todesfuge.” In 1965, Celan wrote the poem “No More Sand Art”<sup>8</sup> as a rebuttal to the public’s misconceptions. “No More Sand Art” is a poem that communicates devastation and destruction through a lack of cadence, broken language, and cryptic metaphors. The challenging structure and ambiguous metaphors that compose “No More Sand Art” allow the reader to explore the diverse intentions and themes of the poem so that she can discover that Celan’s poetic “truth” has many different facets. The complexity of “No More Sand Art” succeeds in creating a multiplicity of experiences that defies and eliminates all forms of mastery.

He consciously disrupts the musical continuity from the beginning of the poem to demonstrate his resistance of aesthetic mastery. The first line of the poem, “no more sand art, no sand book, no masters,” maintains a musical rhythm that neither drives the poem forward nor contains the flamboyant cadence that “Todesfuge” demonstrates; it displays a slightly different rhythm that descends—the first phrase is the longest (“no more sand art”) while the last phrase is the shortest (“no masters”). Thus, the reader does not get distracted by its overt musicality, which allows her to focus solely on the meaning of the poem.

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<sup>8</sup> Felstiner’s translation of Celan’s “No More Sand Art” can be found on page 220 of Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew.

Celan combines religious imagery with linguistic commentary so that the reader can comprehend his continuing devastation. From the first line, “no more sand art, no sand book, no masters,” Celan metaphorically alludes to the religious and linguistic themes that persist throughout the entire poem. The word “sand,” which is repeated twice in the opening line, demonstrates a loss of uniqueness due to the inability of each sand pellet to maintain its individuality from the others; all of the pellets get combined to make one word, “sand,” with one meaning, which mimics the rationale Hitler used to define all Jews. But by declaring “no more sand art,” Celan not only rejects the Nazis’ mastery of establishing fixed meanings but also repudiates his own aesthetic mastery. With “no more sand art,” Celan demonstrates that he no longer can make art out of the remains of the dead—the sand within the urns—which attests to his lack of aesthetic mastery. His inability to create art out of the sand that remains prevents him from producing a sand book, which refers to his first published collection of poetry, Sand from the Urns. Celan renounced his successful book, which contained “Todesfuge” as the final poem, because he felt that it communicated his unimaginable experience too explicitly. Due to his belief that he portrayed his experience imprecisely, Celan appears to doubt his own capabilities as a poet. Paradoxically, he rejects his own ability of mastering the art of poetry within a poem. Therefore, he communicates his previous lack of aesthetic mastery while he, at the same time, destabilizes his current poetic language to avoid simplicity and, inherently, mastery.

As the only two-syllable, plural word in the first line, “masters” stands out as the greatest loss of all. He deliberately uses the word “masters” rather than “mastery” to demonstrate the continuance of linguistic mastery, which he revealed in the “Bremen

Speech” by illustrating that the word “reich” is rooted in “enriched.” However, he asserts that though “mastery” persists, the “masters,” those who are in control of it, do not exist. Celan purposefully pluralizes the word “masters” in order to illustrate its multiplicity of meanings. While it refers to the overall loss of Jews’ abilities to master their own identities during the Holocaust, “no masters” also describes the loss of the mastery of meaning. Anne Carson, a literary analyst who thoroughly examines Celan’s “No More Sand Art,” indicates that the phrase “no masters” alludes to Celan’s “Todesfuge,” which contains the line “death is a master from Deutschland” (Carson 115).<sup>9</sup> Because of Carson’s discovery, I would suggest that Celan rejects the notion of death being a master that solely derives from Germany because death has been and always will be the master of all living beings. Therefore, though it is a master, death does not come from Germany. Because of the countless misinterpretations of this line, Celan denies a mastery of fixed poetic meaning.

By indicating “no masters,” Celan also denounces the mastery of aesthetics, such as the artist he most translated, Stéphane Mallarmé. Mallarmé was a French poet who used obscure language that was difficult to understand as it too rebelled against traditional syntax. Mallarmé’s poetry explores the connection between content and form and focuses solely on the sound and musicality of words rather than meanings. Celan, who once greatly admired Mallarmé’s poetry, now appears to reject Mallarmé’s aestheticism due to the lack of significance he places on the meaning of words. Because of this, Celan no longer imitated Mallarmé’s poetry or poetic style at the time he wrote

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<sup>9</sup> The translation of this line, along with the entire poem “Todesfuge,” can be found in Felstiner’s Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew on page 31.

“No More Sand Art,” in 1965. Thus, various scholars, such as Felstiner and Carson, argue that Celan rejects this type of aestheticism that Mallarmé employs.

Celan’s next declaration in the poem “nothing on the dice” appears to allude to Mallarmé’s “A Throw of Dice.” Celan may be rejecting his former art style, portrayed in “Todesfuge,” that sought to poeticize his Holocaust reality by explicitly displaying his experience (Carson 115). In fact, Celan may be making a greater argument: a Holocaust survivor cannot explicitly convey what he physically, psychologically, and emotionally endured due to his inability to master his own Holocaust experience that completely relied on luck. By conveying “nothing on the dice,” Celan demonstrates that nothing is nor can be won by dicing. He uses the word “dice” to communicate a devastating truth of the Holocaust—a victim’s fate often was determined by sheer luck. Felman claims, “Celan gives testimony [...] to a [...] disastrous fate in which nothing any more can be constructed as accident except, perhaps, for the poet’s own survival” (Felman 25). She asserts that the Jews survived because of luck; but, paradoxically, they were not lucky to survive. This duality of the concept of luck conveys a devastating truth that a Holocaust victim, such as Celan, could not master his own experience when he does not control his own fate.

He demonstrates his lack of mastery over his own experience by syntactically interrupting the following question: “how many / Mutes?” By inserting a line break in the middle of the question rather than at the end, Celan displays his difficult, but not impossible, task of transcribing his Holocaust experience; he must disrupt the ordinary flow of both the question and poem itself in order to communicate his experience. George Steiner, whose study, Language and Silence, focuses on the relationship between



language and trauma, concludes, “a writer who feels that the condition of language is in question, that the word may be losing something of its humane genius, [...] may seek to render his own idiom representative of the general crisis to convey through it the precariousness and vulnerability of the communicative act” (Steiner 49-50). Steiner rightly argues that a writer who attempts to convey his traumatic experience to the reader might rupture the structure of his work so that it becomes an illustration of the crisis itself. In addition, the disunity allows for ambiguity, which requires interpretation and, thus, communicates a multiplicity of experiences. For example, if she applies Steiner’s argument to Celan’s poetry, the reader discovers that Celan may syntactically interrupt the line in order to illuminate the malleability of language. The Nazis exploited the malleability of language in order to deceive the prisoners so as to preserve their ignorance. However, similar to Delbo’s technique, Celan exploits the instability of language but for the opposite purpose—to allow the pre-Holocaust reader to witness linguistic deception.

The line break not only interrupts the question but also causes “Mutes” to become a one-word line. Thus, Celan stresses the importance of the word “Mutes,” or those who perished in various ways during the Holocaust and, thus, no longer can speak for themselves. He numerically illustrates the state of the mutes when he answers his own question: “how many / Mutes? / Seventeen.” The polysemous word “seventeen” allows for a multiplicity of experiences because, when translated in different languages, it offers different meanings. In German, the number “seventeen” once again may dismiss Mallarmè, who was a numerologist. However, when translated into Hebrew, the number “seventeen” appears to dramatize the prisoners who turned into mutes. In Hebrew, the

number eighteen spells out living, and because the number seventeen is one less than eighteen, the number suggests that the mutes fell short and perished. Throughout the rest of his poem, Celan slowly shows the path of the mutes by producing an inevitable silence in Hebrew that mimics the inevitable path of the Jews in the Holocaust.

The next two lines are directed towards the reader: “your question—your answer. / your song, what does it know?” As addressed when discussing the Bremen Speech, Celan directly speaks to the reader in an attempt to reach out to her. In another of his speeches entitled “The Meridian,” which he gave upon receiving the Georg Büchner Prize on 22 October 1960, Celan explained, “the poem intends another, needs this other, needs an opposite. It goes toward it, bespeaks it” (Celan 49). Celan’s poetry depends on the reader to join the dialogue within his poetry so that he can communicate his experience. The reader successfully enters into dialogue with Celan by attempting to analyze and uncover his cryptic metaphors. In order to understand the meaning of the poem, the reader must create a connection between the metaphors and Celan’s experience, thereby entering into dialogue with his poetry. Poetry now enables him to seek an approachable reader even though the Nazis intended to obliterate the possibility of any address. Thus, he destroys the Nazis’ ability to master dialogue and language as he communicates with the reader through an ambiguous question, which frees language from destructive fixed meanings.

The cryptic lines, “your question—your answer. / your song, what does it know?” prevent the reader from knowing exactly what Celan means. In searching for the meaning, the reader opposes linguistic mastery by developing many plausible possibilities of what these lines may reference. The question and answer might refer to

“your song, what does it know?”; in this instance, the reader’s “song” symbolizes the melodious rhythm of Jewish prayers and blessings. In asking what the song knows, Celan directly questions the reader’s religious tradition as it fails to transmit the truth of the Holocaust. The lines also might be directed toward the poem as a whole as he asks “your song, what does it know?”; in this instance, he questions the poem’s knowledge of a place where genocide and mastery ruled. In addition, the lines could refer to the question and answer in the previous stanza [“how many / Mutes? / Seventeen.”]. No matter what the question references, its answer follows with either sounds or silence, depending on which language the reader interprets the poem.

The breakdown, which maintains a sense of precision, begins when the reader encounters the word “Deepinsnow.” The word “Deepinsnow,” which combines the words “deep,” “in,” and “snow,” is the only term in “Deepinsnow, / Epinnow, / E-i-o” that resides within the reader’s pre-Holocaust language. Even though the beginning of the poem causes the reader to become consumed by the amount of sand, the end displays a sudden shift in elements from sand to snow, solid to liquid. Yet, what gets buried “Deepinsnow” remains uncertain. It could refer to the burial of his mother as the snow caused her to become physically vulnerable, which, ultimately, led to her death. Along with his mother, Celan buries language deep under the snow. Though he testifies in the Bremen Speech that language resurfaces after the Holocaust, Celan repudiates his early poetry because the public misunderstood the meaning. Therefore, through this poem, “No More Sand Art,” which acts as a rebuttal to his earlier work, Celan buries the language that had once resurfaced. He visually demonstrates the burial of language as the word “Deepinsnow” slowly gets broken down and becomes progressively covered by snow.

Yet, as a liquid, the snow slowly melts away until nothing is left but the white space on the page. The snow begins melting when “Deepinsnow” loses many of its consonants to become “Eepinnow,” which still contains the majority of the letters in the word “snow.” Yet, the snow completely disintegrates as the word “Eepinnow” loses all of its consonants so that the vowels are the only remaining letters, “e-i-o.” If she reads the poem in German, the reader understands this final stanza as an effort, but failure, to communicate comprehensible words since only sounds remain. When read in Hebrew, the poem ends in silence. Hebrew solely is written in consonants, and by ending his poem in vowels, Celan joins the seventeen mutes in silence. Dori Laub, a professor of psychiatry, claims, “the imperative to tell the story of the Holocaust is inhabited by the impossibility of telling and, therefore, silence about the truth commonly prevails” (Laub 79). Laub asserts that the limitations of reconstructing his Holocaust experience using language, especially the German language, forces Celan to rely on the motif of silence to finish his thoughts. However, Celan’s use of silence does not demonstrate the limits of language but, rather, illustrates its ability to recreate a difficult feeling or experience. Though not directly communicated, the silence articulates the inexpressible events that Celan experienced amidst the Holocaust.

Though Celan’s poem appears to progressively deteriorate into non-sense, “No More Sand Art” displays a visual breakdown to illustrate what Laub determines incomprehensible—Celan’s experience amidst the Holocaust. The rhythmical unpredictability that drives the poem forward prevents the reader from fulfilling her preconceived narrative expectation. Therefore, she must examine the disjointed linguistic cohesion and the ambiguous metaphors in order to discover the meaning of the poem,

which combines the question of Jewish existence with the question of mastery. In both “No More Sand Art” and the “Bremen Speech,” Celan defies the intention of Nazi mastery by reproducing images and words that create numerous meanings. Through this multiplicity of experiences, Celan communicates with an approachable reader and audience who both understand his Holocaust experience and comprehend his present disorientation. Similarly, Delbo strives to connect to the reader by communicating through the very language that she is destabilizing; this paradoxical method simultaneously avoids a destructive simplicity and enables the reader to experience the unsettling effects of uncertainty. She too breaks the reader’s structural and narrative expectations by describing her experience through a sequence of disjointed vignettes that enable the reader to experience the similar jarring effects of arbitrary randomness that she endured. Within each vignette, Delbo destabilizes the reader’s pre-Holocaust linguistic framework by exploiting the malleability and, thus, insecurity of language to enable the reader to visually encounter her Auschwitz experience. Even though they use different methods to describe their experiences, Charlotte Delbo and Paul Celan bridge the gap between their post-Holocaust linguistic systems and the reader’s pre-Holocaust language, which enables the reader to understand their seemingly incomprehensible experiences.

## Bremen Speech<sup>10</sup>

The words 'denken' and 'danken', to think and to thank, have the same root in our language. If we follow it to 'gedenken', 'eingedenk sein', 'Andenken' and 'Andacht' we enter the semantic fields of memory and devotion. Allow me to thank you from there.

The region from which I come to you – with what detours! but then, is there such a thing as a detour? – will be unfamiliar to most of you. It is the home of many of the Hassidic stories which Martin Buber has retold in German. It was—if I may flesh out this topographical sketch with a few details which are coming back to me from a great distance—it was a landscape where both people and books lived. There, in this former province of the Habsburg monarchy, now dropped from history, I first encountered the name Rudolf Alexander Schroder while reading Rudolf Borchardt's 'Ode with Pomegranate'. There, the word Bremen took shape for me: in the publications of the 'Bremer Presse'.

But though Bremen was brought closer through books, through the names of writers and publishers of books, it still had the sound of the unreachable.

Within reach, though far enough, what I could aim to reach, was Vienna. You know what happened, in the years to come, even to this nearness.

Only one thing remained reachable, close and secure amid all losses: language. Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained secure against loss. But it had to go through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence, through the thousand darknesses of murderous speech. It went through. It gave me no words for what was happening, but went through it. Went through and could resurface, 'enriched' by it all.

In this language I tried, during those years and the years after, to write poems: in order to speak, to orient myself, to find out where I was, where I was going, to chart my reality.

It meant movement, you see, something happening, being *en route*, an attempt to find a direction. Whenever I ask about the sense of it, I remind myself that this implies the question as to which sense is clockwise.

For the poem does not stand outside time. True, it claims this infinite and tries to reach across time—but across, not above.

A poem, being an instance of language, hence essentially dialogue, may be a letter in a bottle thrown out to sea with the—surely not always strong—hope that it may somehow wash up somewhere, perhaps on a shoreline of the heart. In this way, too, poems are *en route*: they are headed toward.

Toward what? Toward something open, inhabitable, an approachable you, perhaps, an approachable reality.

Such realities are, I think, at stake in a poem.

I also believe that this kind of thinking accompanies not only my own efforts, but those of other, younger poets. Efforts of those who, with manmade stars flying overhead, unsheltered even by the traditional tent of the sky, carry their existence into language, racked by reality and in search of it.

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<sup>10</sup> Celan, Paul. Collected Prose. Trans. Rosmarie Waldrop. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1986.

## No More Sand Art<sup>11</sup>

No more sand art, no sand book, no masters.  
Nothing on the dice. How many  
Mutes?  
Seventeen.

Your question—your answer.  
Your song, what does it know?

Deepinsnow,  
    Epinnow,  
        E – i – o.

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<sup>11</sup> Felstiner, John. Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

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